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AUTHOR Cotoia, Anthony M.
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ABSTRACT

Many concerned academic administrators are turning to marketing as the cure for shrinking enrollments. These administrators often have unrealistic expectations of what marketing techniques can achieve. Marketing cannot cover up for programs of poor quality, create customers in an over-harvested market, or overcome high attrition when students leave faster than they can be recruited. However, when marketing is done well it can enable a college to make intelligent decisions; assist in understanding educational needs; facilitate the refinement of a college's mission, goals, and objectives; attract new students; retain current students; and develop a well-informed community and student body. Priorities in developing a marketing plan include obtaining the chief administrator's support, addressing each aspect of the institutional image, using the research arm of the school, and identifying constituencies. A successful marketing plan may have unexpected spin-off effects, and therefore the plan should include alternatives for coping with change. Additional tips for developing a sound marketing plan include writing college publications in plain, understandable language; utilizing a variety of innovative advertising techniques; exploring alternative funding sources; and considering the development of a quality control department. (LAL)

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MARKETING: EDUCATORS NEW BUZZ WORD

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SHARING AND SHAPING OUR FUTURE

Toronto, Canada

by

Dr. Anthony M. Cotoia, Executive Dean

Central New England College

Westborough, Massachusetts

JC 860536

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MARKETING: WHAT IT IS AND IS NOT!!

The word marketing is often confused with terms like sales promotion, advertisement or public relations. Marketing is not sales promotion, advertising or public relations. Marketing is made of stuff that ensures that people are satisfied with the services they receive. Sales, advertising, and public relations are important, but they are not the same as marketing. The achievement of customer satisfaction is the true measure of power released by the applications of marketing techniques.

Innovation is to student recruitment what marketing is now to institutional survival! Many concerned senior academic administrators are turning to education's new buzz word - MARKETING - as the cure for the sores of shrinking enrollment. Often community colleges look to an assistant registrar/admissions counselor/English professor/part-time public relations expert for direction in turning the numbers situation around.

Some colleges have hidden behind the rose-colored subterfuge of redefinition of the marketing term. In so doing, disjointed existing efforts, lacking direction or plan, have been labeled "The College's

Marketing Effort" in order to appease those who question what is being done to meet total student/college needs.

So, with an eye to seeking that which can be accomplished by any college regardless of size, I direct your attention to the marketing center ring: "Our Product and Its Sales." An obvious basic precept is that as educators, we must fully know and understand the collegiate product. Do we? Pinning down what we are and what we offer, may be harder than would initially appear. It is sad to say that many within the proverbial ivory towers have lost touch with our consumers.

Marketing, therefore, is no panacea. There are many things it cannot do, and often colleges have unrealistic expectations of what short-term application of marketing techniques can achieve. Some of the disclaimers are:

* Marketing cannot cover up for poor quality programs. Before results can be expected from marketing activities, the quality of the programs and services must be established.

* Marketing cannot be expected to create customers in an over-harvested market. When an area is over supplied with college campuses, marketing will do little to improve the health of the organization.

* Marketing alone will not overcome high attrition when students leave faster than they can be recruited. Many other forces must be harnessed simultaneously as marketing strategies are employed. Students have to stay in college long enough to get the benefit of things that can satisfy them. We know that many students who register never get into the classroom. This loss may be avoided by developing better vehicles for registering people than presently exist. Marketing is not the appropriate tool in this case.

OUTCOME OF PLANNED MARKETING

Marketing, it should be noted, is effective in getting new customers, but there is much more to the concept than this utilitarian outcome suggests. With the account of an analysis of the college weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and strengths, a more flexible and resilient organization can emerge that will be better able to meet the challenge of the decades ahead.

Marketing can also be helpful in:

* facilitating a college's efforts in exploiting new programs and opportunities.
* satisfying the actual needs and wants of students.
* improving the quality and mix of students.
* improving the quality of healthy academic and technical programs.

What are the results that can be expected when marketing is done well? Some of the expected outcomes from a properly run marketing operation are that it:

* enables a college to arrive at intelligent decisions about the type of courses/programs or services that students will need as well as support.
* assists college personnel in understanding these needs in order to facilitate-reasonable modification of existing programs.

* facilitates the refining of the missions, goals and objectives of the college over the short and long term.

* attracts new students that the college can best serve with existing resources.

* retains current students and satisfies their needs.

* develops a well informed community and student body regarding existing programs, services, and resources.

When marketing is done well, it becomes inseparable from ordinary effective management or administration.

PRIORITIZING THE MARKETING PLAN

The first priority in establishing any marketing plan is to obtain the chief administrator's unilateral endorsement and support by soliciting his input, dreams, and thoughts concerning the college.

Each aspect of the institutional image should be discussed, such as:

* What are its strong points?
* What are its weaknesses?
* What are its directions?
* What does the college head perceive that the public desires of the college?

These same questions should be asked of:

* other top-level administrators
* mid-level personnel
* program heads
* instructors
* student support staff

Next, using the research arm of the school, put these questions to legislators, community leaders, representatives of business and industry, high school administrators and teachers, alumni and presently enrolled students! A good process of analysis might be employed at this point that would allow a maintenance of autonomy. The Delphi technique could be useful.

The next phase, after ascertaining the perceptions of others, is the identification of constituencies within the geographic area which the college serves.

* Who are your publics?

* What are the demographics?

  . heads of single parent households
  . recently retired
  . women seeking employment
  . high school drop outs
  . blue collar laborers seeking self-improvement
  . institutionalized/homebound
  . entry or low-level white collar workers

* How can they best be reached?

* Does each group have particular media viewing or reading habits?

* Through what medium can the information be made most interesting and available to them?

There are a variety of vehicles through which one can positively promote and advance the image of a college. It is limitless for those with fertile imaginations. Therefore, it is essential that the college's marketing plan contain a marketing philosophy, research, communications, resources, and the overall plan becomes a top priority and not an afterthought of the college's goal.

BE PREPARED FOR SPINOFFS

If the primary objective is to increase head count enrollment, then the college could be suddenly forced with numbers of under-prepared, non-oriented students with different educational goals from those perceived by the college. If this is the case, the faculty and staff better be included in the marketing effort from the beginning.

The following are unexpected spin-off effects from a successful non-student marketing program:

* New groups of clientele can have a direct effect on curriculum.
* A design may emerge, based on community needs, which favor the part-time student. This could mean mostly evening, Saturday, and even Sunday classes. Are faculty prepared for this?
* There may be a demand for a wider assortment of learning systems including style and delivery. Are faculty prepared for this?
* Part-time, underchallenged women may place demands on off-campus programs, child care, and special offerings.
* You may discover that the business and industrial community expects more tailoring to their specific needs on on-site delivery.
* Minorities will certainly emerge in larger numbers, particularly in urban and semi-urban communities.

A broad marketing system will inevitably produce a wide range of, perhaps new, education problems and these will place demands and affect available human resources and institutional patterns. When you market the product, you invite change! Be prepared for this by making sure that all appropriate people know what may happen and are prepared to accept it.

The objectives of a marketing plan should be stated in such a way as to reflect the possibility of change and alternatives of how to cope with change. The objectives could be formulated to increase enrollment through improved and/or expanded program development; to improve the college itself as a vital, flexible, two-year public institution; and, thereby, improve its public image as a means of increased enrollment. In other words, we are looking for more students by improving our programs and by improving or expanding our ability to deliver these programs in a more varied manner.

Two Basic Population Groups

Present students and presently, non-students are two groups upon which to concentrate the college's marketing efforts. Let's consider marketing techniques we can use in working with our present students.

Attrition being what it is in the community college, if we could keep more of our present students for longer periods of time and convince each of them to carry one or two more courses, we would not be talking about enrollment and reduced credit hours. We have student headcount, but it is obvious that the older married students must now devote less time to study than they did in the past. It could be our fault, whereas the institution did not adjust properly from full-time to part-time student.

Students should be surveyed as to how we can improve programs and services for them. A simple survey of our students should address the problems of:

* appropriateness of time and schedule
* appropriateness of programs
* a wider variety of appropriate, but more convenient, learning systems, e.g.,. television, radio, courses by newspapers, independent or individualized instruction, computer assisted instruction, etc.
* support services
* availability of support personnel
* registration procedures

This survey should be simple and understandable to the present student.

For marketing purposes, these are two categories of non-students:

* The first category are the great mass who come from the social problems of the last two decades. These are potential students who have no desire, knowledge, or understanding of higher education. They don't read our brochures, schedules, or promotional material. They need special encouragement.

* The second group is made up of those who are in the work force and who have had some success planning their immediate future. To this group, the word "college" and the concept of more education is a reality.

Both of these categories of non-students are marketable through agencies, business and industry. Neither group is susceptible to normal collegiate promotional attempts.

However, the first category is best approached through the social agency concerned with the problems of this particular generation. The social agencies normally are excited over the prospects of a new resource that is open to them in making constructive progress with their own particular clientele. A word of caution is that the college must be prepared to deliver to this first category of non-student appropriate developmental courses.

The second category of potential students is very exciting and perhaps offers the best opportunity to encourage people to consider the concept of life-long

learning. The effort in marketing this student can bolster traditional college programs, as well as provide single training courses for the business community. What we so often overlook is the indirect and direct group and individual counseling opportunity which this activity of providing courses on-site to business and industry offers community colleges. Each employee in a special training program is a potential long-range student with individual objectives, which often reach far beyond enrollment in a short, specially designed course. These temporary students only need information and encouragement to pursue a broader range of study. Also, this information is communicated to the family members of the employee.

THE COLLEGE PUBLICATIONS: DOUBLETALK OR SNOWJOB

I often ask myself for whom are we writing our catalogs and brochures? If we are writing for average high school graduates, then we are only fooling ourselves if we think they are going to understand something that to the college graduate is perfectly clear. Course descriptions are normally written by instructors or department chairmen; however, perhaps we can excuse them on the grounds that they "think" in these terms.

Often college administrators argue that the catalog must be written in a language that constitutes a "legal document." In reality, catalogs should be written in the plain language of 30 - 40 years ago. College students, even those in the middle of their freshman or sophomore year, do not understand much of the vocabulary used to describe college policies. A student's decision about which college to attend is only as good as the information on which it is based. It is the college's responsibility to provide information that is complete, accurate, and to the point.

In some instances if the recruitment literature is accurate, the message may be distorted if it is written at a level and vocabulary too difficult for the student to understand. If we truly believe that we have learned about the reading levels of our students, why do we deliberately eliminate them from the audience when we write our informational material?

If we want to tell current or potential students something about our institution or communicate an idea or concept to them we have only two problems:

* we have to be sure that they have the ability to grasp the idea, and;

* we have to be sure to put the idea or message into words in a way which gives the students the chance they need to grasp it.

A point to remember is that you cannot just "speak English" to someone else who "speaks English" and necessarily convey your thoughts to that person. You have to speak the kind of English they know. You have to reach their language level. College catalogs and other instructional material should be analyzed by the college's reading specialist who utilizes some simple readability formula and then rewrites the material in a manner which is clear without insulting the student's intelligence.

ADVERTISING

Advertising is often considered a controversial subject and sometimes still offends the dignity of academics by implying that education is product-oriented, and as such, deserves its berth in the marketplace. While community colleges do not have products - such as clothes, food, or automobiles to sell, the college must merchandise the institution's educational services just as businesses do their products and services. The current emphasis on educational marketing regards it as a process whereby a college seeks to understand the needs of the public and serve them accordingly. It is within this framework that colleges should consider both promotion (advertising) and retention strategies.

A key point we must consider in advertising: Are the conventional means appropriate or unorthodox approaches necessary? With fertile imaginations, there are limitless vehicles through which college administrators can positively promote and advance the image of an institution.

A few successful examples are:

* Direct mail - most widely used by every type of advertiser. When direct mail (direct advertising) is reinforced by newspaper ads, it reaches a large classification of the public. Direct mail can be addressed to specific locales or sub-populations; or using the "shotgun approach", addressed to the general population. However, control of distribution allows for more reliable evaluative systems than with radio or television. Direct mail can be measured by taking telephone calls or counting the return of coupons or mail-backs.

* Outdoor medium - billboards - 16 billboards in the Des Moines Community College district reached 152,600 people daily. Basically that was 50 percent of the area's population. By the end of a 30-day period, 89.7 percent of the total adults in the Des Moines area had been reached. During that 30-day period. the message was seen 18.8 times by the prime interest group.

* Public Service Announcements - F.C.C. requires radio and television stations to broadcast a certain amount of free time. The material needs to be imaginative so it doesn't air prior to sign-off time or following shows for insomniacs.

  However, the value of requests for such times and space remain unpredictable since it depends entirely upon the discretion of the media.

* Speaking Engagements.

* Booths at College Fairs, shopping malls.

* Bag Stuffers at Retail Stores.

* Tabloids sent to every household in district.

* Cooperative advertising. This concept has been prevalent for years among commercial enterprises. Colleges could cooperate and produce public service spots for radio and television. Also, publications and productions could be designed to include other services which the college district provides.

* Paid advertisements in college publications listing day care services, private recreational programs, social services, restaurants, etc., within the college's service area, would also defray cost and promote mutual interest.

In lieu of paid and public service advertising, public relations professionals generally feel that the personal contact provides the only reasonable hope of communicating with those in the college services area. This can be usually accomplished through:

* high school visitations - early in the academic year.
* campus receptions and tours.
* visiting high school counselors, coaches, etc.
* college fairs.
* telephone canvassing.
* hosting social service agencies, businesses, etc.

Granting that the word of mouth constitutes the best advertising, colleges cannot rely on this alone.

Over the long haul, simple advertising techniques will not be sufficient, and if we plan a long-range campaign as though a community college education were a better toothpaste, the campaign will surely fail. Advertising alone cannot solve the problem. Educational advertising at its best is nothing more or less than good communications. Businesses stay afloat because their ads work. College campuses will stay in business as long as what they have to sell is quality education.

WHAT NEXT? FINANCING THE MARKETING CAMPAIGN

Commercial enterprises normally consider a modest advertising expenditure of 10-15 percent whereas college advertising budgets normally do not exceed 1 percent of annual operating expenses. Such fiscal limitations prohibit any regular use of radio and television, thus extensive advertising campaigns by individual community colleges become financially impossible. If there are limits on resources, don't burden the initial effort with needless advisory groups and committees. Use them, of course, as your own institutional and community requirements dictate, but don't create them if you really don't need them.

It is only important to remember that marketing is far more than advertising or promotion. For our purposes, community college marketing includes a full understanding of the market, i.e., populations to be served and an objective study of the product itself. We must understand the Full Mission of the college and be willing to exercise our programs for their effectiveness.

Many colleges tend to miss revenue-building opportunities because they do not consider it part of their function to produce income. An organization that falls prey to the psychology of dependence will miss opportunities to affect its own fate. Somehow new grounds must be taken in searching for alternative revenues which could be developed.

Some examples of how some non-profit organizations have managed to do so are as follows:

* The New York Metropolitan Museum of Art makes over $1,000,000 each year by selling art reproductions, productions, greeting cards, and other publications in its shops and bookstore.

* Coastline Community College grosses over $800,000 each year by operating its bookstore in a shopping center. The bookstore of any college may be the best place to concentrate initial efforts at topping unique revenue services. Here are some key questions about improving financial results in bookstore operations.

  . Is the campus the best possible location for the bookstore? What other locations would be feasible? (shopping centers, malls, downtown areas, etc.)

  . Is it possible to open branch operations of the main bookstore in the college's service area?

  . How can we diversify and intensify our bookstore operations for raising capital? (selling calculators, micro computers, software, games, cameras, copy center, etc.)

  . What is the best way to restructure the administration of the bookstore? (marketing committee liaison, faculty input, business input, etc.)

It might be a good idea to think of changing the name of the college bookstore to "Education Market Place" or something like it.

Other market places are the college cafeteria, library, photocopy machines, computer centers, admissions to events, anyplace where the potential of retail sales could occur. Prior to any college exploring alternative funding sources, it is imperative that the thinking of the president and top administrative staff be oriented and involved. Types of questions that facilitate this kind of thinking are:

* Who will be our students?
* What will they be like?
* What program will meet their needs?
* What will be the structure of campus?
* What tuition fees will be charged?
* What and who will be our competition? (satellite, television, video disc, computer franchises, other colleges?)

CONTROLLING THE PRODUCT

The college may want to consider the development of a Quality Control Department to monitor the planning process and marketing operations. Some points to consider are:

* Set and enforce standards of responsive marketing behavior.
* Conduct consumer research.
* Conduct consumer relations.
* Manage the handling of complaints.

The Quality Control Department could also:

* Act on student/consumer appeals.
* Coordinate advertising.
* Review all academic publications that reach the community.
* Conduct legree audits on students.

QUESTION/ANSWER SESSION

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